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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT OPENS, ABSENT OPPOSITION

REF: GEORGETOWN 974

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DAVID M. ROBINSON FOR REASON 1.4(d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A series of meetings and phone calls between President Jagdeo and opposition party leaders seemed to clear a path for the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) to attend the opening of Parliament on September 28, but walk out before Jagdeo's speech. However, an eleventh hour rebellion by radical elements within the PNCR forced party leader Robert Corbin into a boycott. With almost all of her party absent, PNCR Executive Committee member Clarissa Riehl nonetheless became Deputy Speaker. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Tuesday saw intense discussions between President Jagdeo and the leaders of the AFC, PNCR, and Guyana Action Party-Rise Organize and Rebuild (GAP-ROAR) about how to get all parties to attend the opening of Parliament on Thursday. AFC leaders Khemraj Ramjattan and Raphael Trotman told EmbOffs that they planned to go into Parliament, and reported that PNCR leader Robert Corbin also wanted to attend the opening, but needed a way to save face. On Tuesday the legal community consensus was that the courts would rule in favor of the government in the AFC's court challenge on the constitutionality of Parliament. The legal community was also predicting a sound wrist slap for Jagdeo, giving Corbin a way to attend Parliament without seeming to concede the legal point.

¶3. (SBU) On Wednesday, Chief Justice Carl Singh ruled, as expected, that despite the unconstitutional delay, the President had the legal authority to convene Parliament and name ministers. The anticipated wrist slap was absent.

¶4. (SBU) Just before Parliament convened at 2:00pm September 28, Corbin faced a last minute challenge from PNCR hardliners calling for a boycott. Corbin had reportedly planned to go into Parliament with his full delegation, staying just long enough to elect a Deputy Speaker and a Leader of the Opposition, and walking out before Jagdeo's 3:00pm address. But with a handful of his members refusing to go in at all, Corbin had to keep the whole party out in order to avoid advertising his lack of authority. PNCR member Deborah Backer was sent in to nominate Clarissa Riehl for Deputy Speaker before walking out again. Riehl's nomination was seconded by Prime Minister Hinds and confirmed when no other candidates were put forward.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Corbin wanted to attend the opening of the National Assembly, and the PPP and the AFC were willing to help him do it in a face-saving manner. That a few hardliners could scuttle Corbin's plans and force a walkout

confirms his dwindling power in the party. While political bickering and legal challenges are sure to continue, the extensive discussions between party leaders, who share a cordial social camaraderie, and lack of PPP or AFC challenge to Riehl for Deputy Speaker, signal that the AFC and the PPP may be willing to help Corbin keep his party together enough to participate in Parliament.

ROBINSON